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October 2017

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SHANNON'S BOOK CONTINUED

By ANNA J. COOPER

My readers will possibly remember that last week's column noted a recent publication considered by the writer more than usually significant. In fact "The Negro in Washington" with its pious platitudes and sympathetic yearning to "save the Negro from loss of precious Race Integrity thru contact with vicious whites," is put in such a way as to stir more bitterness and work a deeper, a more enduring economic hardship than the most brutal insults and diatribes anent "missing links" and malodorous inferiority could ever have done. Insulting lies can be passed over with silent contempt; and even in Mr. Shannon's book his chimerical scheme of getting all not-whites happily herded into Africa may well be ignored. But economic facts, so marshaled as to lead inevitably to group conflicts and irreconcilable racial bitterness bring us face to face with a situation which I deem of sufficient moment to call for more than a cursory review. I have singled out this week two specific quotations which I will ask the thoughtful reader to consider,—not for the purpose of academic discussion or sulphuric denunciation, but by way of offering perhaps an opportunity on both sides for clear constructive thinking and some inter-racial understanding.

When one sees clearly the subtler forces that are so astutely and so insidiously at work, there should be, in place of the usual hysteria and soap box declamation, a calm, intelligent and quiet thinking the thing thru, arriving here and there eventually at individual purposive judgments. This seems to me the only safe and sane way of approaching hoped for results and building up something in the

way of a sound policy and a useful, if not organic, line of action.

Organization doubtless is an approved method, but it is conceivable that a handicap can be utterly paralyzed by over-organization. "The strength of the wolf is in the pack" says Kelly Miller. "Except when they are drowning!" say I. A solidarity of suffering and of opposing forces is only too evident and undeniable. But there are circumstances that would be rendered increasingly awkward and painful by too great solidarity of machinery. The big thing is that we get to know and trust,—a community of interest, a community of simple sympathy. At any rate we ought to understand one another better, and when we realize that the hurt is after all a part of the great human hurt, we shall not go futilely, striking friend and foe blindly as an irritated infant uses arms, legs, and diaphragm to kick the air. As already said the unemployment problem is the one biggest "hurt" in the economic world of today. The man of color is by no means the only sufferer. His color simply accentuates it in his neighborhoods and punctuates the bitterness in the struggle for bread. It may be that our western civilization has not mastered the technique of distribution and may be that man's greed is wholly to blame for the sickening chasms between wealth and poverty, where the rich grow automatically richer and the poor poorer. Surely the earth is productive enough to afford sustenance for all its children, and a man with brains and energy in the wide stretches of the United States ought not inertly to rot like a cabbage in one spot because he happened to be born there. It may be, that the onward stride of scientific invention and the craze for mass production, like the car of Juggernaut, is trampling in the dust and grinding to powder the helpless victims of a machine age. Sure I admit that something is wrong when wages are being paid for tree-sitting and Niagara barrelling instead of for wheat harvesting and cotton picking; and when Alabama takes more pride in Bobby Jones for playing golf than in Booker Washington for inaugurating a system of education in practical farming for the larger half of its population.

There is something wrong I admit, and am equally sure that weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth will not right it.

But here are the quotations from Shannon's book. Read them silently, think them over calmly, then judge what is best or simply what can be done about it. It may be you will decide, as I do, to do your work that comes to hand tomorrow as you have done today, to plan your household, train your children, support your institutions, give a fair wage to the few you are able to hire and go whistling on your way. Certainly not to hire a hall to "discuss" the problem, nor yet to conclude that none of these things touch you; but understandingly and fellow-feeling to help where, when, and if you can.

"For every Negro trained as a skilled artizan a white skilled artizan, actual or potential is displaced. For every such Negro who builds a home and rears a family, somewhere a white man is either deprived of the chance to build a home and rear a family or is driven to content with highly unfavorable conditions in his efforts to do so. The Negro schools in Washington are training carpenters, bricklayers, cement workers etc. Also these schools are fitting men for professional life. Every one of these Negroes will, in so far as he works at his trade here, displace a white worker actual or potential.

"Construction of a large apartment house at G and 18, Washington. Very little of the skilled labor done by Negroes except laying of brick. Hardly a white man was employed at unskilled labor. It was usually the case that for 25 to 75 white men would be on hand at beginning of work each day in hope of being given a job, some remaining till after work was well under way. It was frequently the case that some of these men would be present at the Union Gospel Mission where a light meal and a free bed could be had by those unable to pay for food and lodging. It is at such missions and at Salvation Army stations—and in Jails that one sees the real significance of the meaning of conditions existing in Washington"*

*Shannon: The Negro in Washington p. 175.